

JCS and ARMY Declassification/Release Instructions on File

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on File

TAB A

BACKGROUND
ARC LIGHT PROGRAM

1. (TS) In early March 1965 discussions by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, CINCSAC, CINCPAC, and COMMUSMACV took place. As a result of the recommendations of the three CINCs involved a message was dispatched on 30 April 1965 to CINCSAC and CINCPAC. This message directed that a capability be developed to utilize Guam-based B-52 aircraft for area saturation attacks against selected targets in SVN¹. From the beginning this program has been controlled by the Secretary of Defense. Mr. McNamara has authorized each mission following advice from the Joint Chiefs of Staff and after considering the views of the White House and Department of State on the proposed strikes.

2. (TS) The procedure was as follows:

a. The COMUSMACV, General Westmoreland, would transmit his recommendation for each strike to the JCS, furnishing data on the strike area, limiting points of the area, restrictions, and justifications for the strike. He would also include plans for ground action to exploit the air strike of the area if such action was warranted.

b. The Joint Chiefs of Staff would consider the request and make appropriate recommendations to the Secretary of Defense, at the same time preparing and dispatching a warning order to CINCSAC and CINCPAC outlining the requirements of the strike, alerting them as to the time over target and the objectives of the strike, and furnishing the necessary technical and coordinating instructions.

c. The Secretary of Defense, using the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (ASD/ISA) as his executive agency, would approve or disapprove the strike. His decision was based

¹ JCS 2343/587, 27 April 1965, Memo by J-3 for the Joint Chiefs of Staff on "Utilization of 'Arc Light' B-52 Force (U)."

D-I-A-1

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

on JCS, ASD/ISA recommendations and the views of the White House and Department of State.

d. If the Secretary of Defense approved the strike, the JCS would then issue an execution order.

3. (TS) In addition to ground actions initiated in conjunction with the strikes either to exploit air attack or to provide a ground assessment of the strike, both pre- and post-strike reconnaissance was required for each flight. Photographic coverage of results of this reconnaissance was furnished DIAXX, CINCSAC, and CSAF. DIAXX was to prepare and maintain a Bomb Damage Assessment of each strike.

4. (TS) On 7 August 1965, general planning instructions were promulgated which applied to future strikes for targets in SVN¹. Detailed reporting instructions were furnished CINCSAC for implementation. This reporting system covered the following elements of data.

a. Total bombers airborne on mission and time of first take off.

b. Total bombers releasing bombs in target area.

c. Mission summary, total aircraft which released bombs, total bombs released in target area, total bombs released in other than target area with reason release was made, and any other pertinent data. Report to be submitted within 18 hours of first TOT.

5. (TS) COMUSMACV, in a message to JCS², 16 August 1965, recommended a series of seven B-52 strikes against targets in SVN to be executed during the period 23-31 August inclusive. A conceptual change to the general method by which Guam-based B-52s are committed to such strikes was also recommended. The American Ambassador in Saigon had concurred with the

¹ JCS message 2744/071437Z, August 65, to CINCPAC, CINCSAC, DAIN 46418 and amending message JCS 9408/281715Z, August 65, to same addressees.

² COMUSMACV message to JCS 28722/161147Z, August 1965, JCS IN 95307.

D-I-A-2

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

proposed concept. The specific provisions of the proposal were as follows:

- a. Within SVN, five free bomb zones (FBZs) were developed and approved by the Joint General Staff (JGS), RVNAF, and GVN.
- b. These FBZs encompass known Viet Cong strongholds and were phonetically designated ARC LIGHT Zones Alpha through Echo.
- c. There were no friendly elements in close enough proximity to the FBZs to be a restrictive operational factor and strikes with any number of aircraft at any time could be conducted.
- d. Additionally, the FBZs were not located close to the borders of Laos, Cambodia, or the DMZ. Thus, no risks of border violations were present.
- e. A series of relatively small but frequent attacks, interspersed with maximum effort strikes, would be conducted against specific targets within the FBZ designated by CINCPAC/COMUSMACV.
- f. Strike requests would be confirmed by COMUSMACV at least 24 hours prior to desired time over target.

6. (TS) JCS, on 21 August 1965¹, recommended to the Secretary of Defense as follows:

- a. That they (JCS) be granted execution authority for the proposed series of seven strikes.
- b. That they (JCS) be granted execution authority for future strikes against targets in the FBZs. Decision to be made on worth of each target on individual basis.
- c. That requests for B-52 strikes against targets located outside designated FBZs would continue to be processed for approval under currently established procedures.

7. (TS) The Secretary of Defense approved the JCS recommendations on 29 September 1965.

¹ COMUSMACV message 31946/110835Z Sept 65

D-I-A-3

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

8. (TS) COMUSMACV, on 9 September 1965¹, notified CINCPAC with information to JCS that an additional Free Bomb Zone (FBZ) for ARC LIGHT had been approved by the Joint General Staff, High Command, and the Government of Vietnam on 1 September 1965. (Figure 1 is a map indicating the six FBZ designated for ARC LIGHT Strikes.) CINCPAC concurred with the addition of a FBZ provided that targets proximate to Cambodian border could be resolved to insure that overflights do not occur.

9. (TS) COMUSMACV, on 11 September 1965², in response to a query from SAC requesting rationale and flexibility of ARC LIGHT TOTs, stated that to effectively exploit the element of surprise, fear, and to preclude the establishment of a pattern, TOTs for strikes without ground exploitation are established around the clock. The purpose is to demonstrate to the Viet Cong our capability to attack his base areas which heretofore had been secure from major attack. It was further stated that these TOTs could be considered flexible to a certain extent and every consideration would be given requests for TOT changes.

10. (TS) The JCS, on 6 October 1965³, notified CINCPAC and CINCSAC that the COMUSMACV request, contained in COMUSMACV message 31622/090320Z September 1965, was not feasible at that time but that the Secretary of Defense had approved the JCS recommendation that execution authority be vested in the JCS for all strike requests against targets located in the FBZs. It was stated that the sixth FBZ ALZ Foxtrot would be recommended to the Secretary of Defense for inclusion in the FBZs already approved. Further, COMUSMACV target nominations messages would be considered planning messages subject to CINCPAC approval, and that subsequent JCS planning messages would be promulgated to confirm or amend standing planning instructions previously issued.

¹ COMUSMACV message 31622/090320Z Sept 65

² COMUSMACV message 31946/110835Z Sept 65

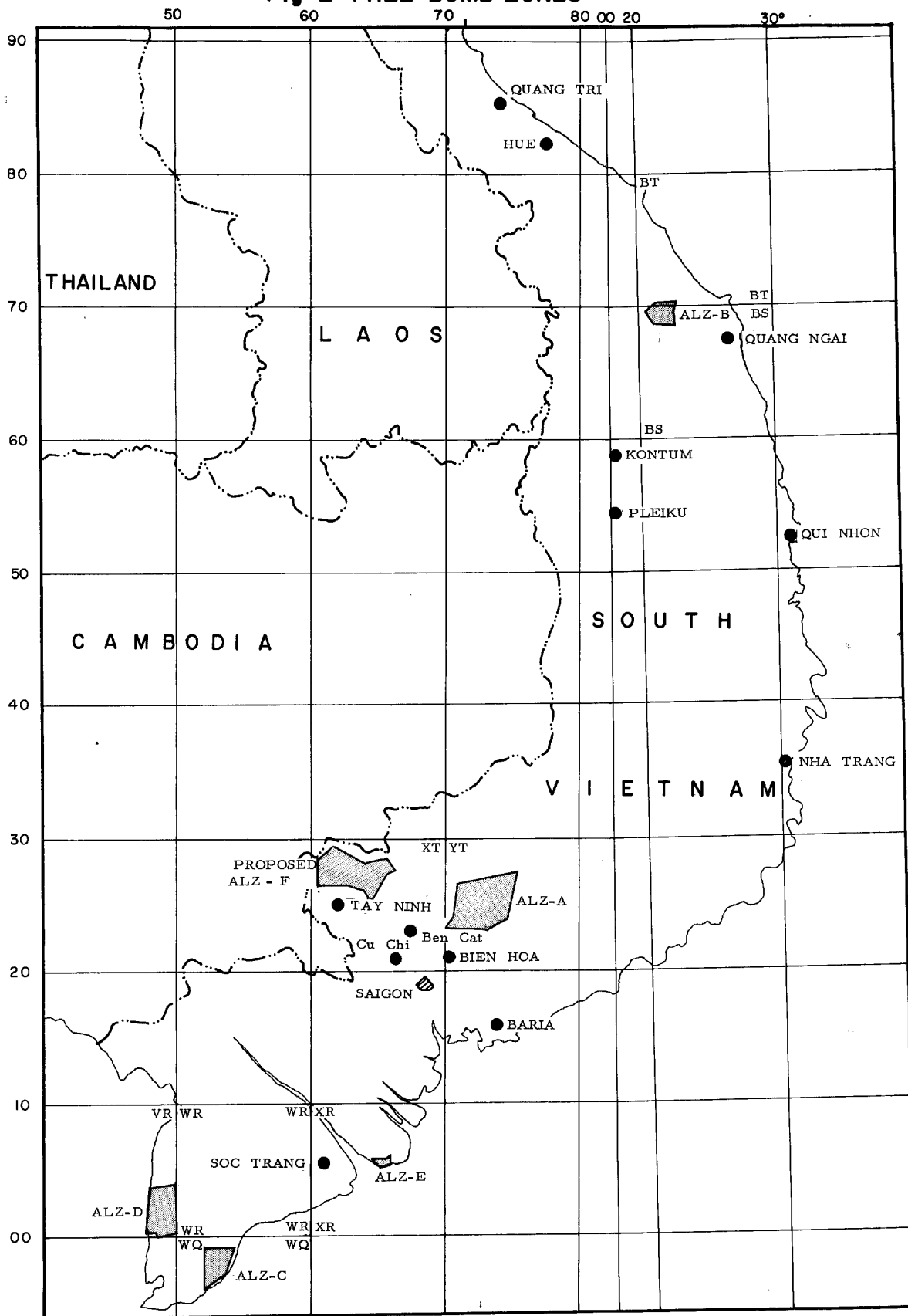
³ JCS message 3448, dated 6 Oct 65 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, DAIN 114687.

D-I-A-4

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

Fig-I FREE BOMB ZONES



1 UTM Square = 100 Kilometers

D-I-A-5
TOP SECRET